

Vasyl Makhno

*From the book of essays "Plenty of Horn"*

At first Grandfather kept his Austrian shoes in the attic, what locals called "the loft"; I don't know where he got them, perhaps from someone in the village or at the bazaar in Chortkiv or Buchach. The boots were rough with wrought taps on the heels and toes held on by metal tacks. They were heavy and I couldn't carry them, those reddish boots covered in dust and standing alone in the separate place allotted them. Initially Grandpa wanted to wear them himself, but the boots turned out to be heavy and rubbed his feet raw, so he decided to sell them.

A few buyers would come by during the week, take a look at the shoes, assure him they were interested, but then never return. On Sundays, when relatives used to call on us, after a feast and a few shots of moonshine, Grandpa would go to the pantry and bring out his shoes, which he'd have previously wiped off with his massive hand. Praising the leather and craftsmanship, he'd offer them for sale. The adoration would start with the fact that these were the boots of an Austrian soldier during the First World War: the lucky devil who'd end up with them (for only a fool would not buy these) couldn't ever wear them out because they were eternal, Grandpa philosophized. This endless pitch and the reluctance of the potential customers to pay an utterly laughable price, 25 rubles—which Grandpa just came up with but refused to back down from even a cent—indeed tired him, after all he still couldn't wrap his mind around how a person could pass on such goods. As time went on, the shoes continued to occupy their lonely place in the pantry and only on Sundays, for customers, were they taken out and buffed, yet it didn't help him get rid of them.

*Translated from Ukrainian by Ali Kinsella*